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Club 25

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, Representatives, and Guests,

My name is Chris Venticinque,
I am an independent business owner of an unlicensed, State sanctioned "Millionaire Party Location"

House Bill 5121 is a direct attack on my new venture, and an attack on a fledgling cottage industry, that supports thousands of jobs across this state!

Although these jobs may not be high paying jobs, many individuals who work these Millionaire Party Locations, use these jobs to supplement their lack of income.

What I am constantly reminded of when speaking to these workers is that their lost incomes were due in part, to the collapse of the American Automobile Industry.

What ever their reason are for working these jobs, weather its paying bills, supporting families or working their way through school, these individuals, like myself, help provide an invaluable service to the charitable organizations they serve.

Evident by the popularity of this program and these locations, the services that Millionaire Party Locations provide is overwhelmingly supported by the organizations that use this program for fund raising, and the patrons that support them for entertainment.

Since 1972, the law known as the "Bingo Act" has provided resources for "Charitable Gaming" but had been relatively benign in comparison to recent years. Bingo, and the later coming, game tickets, had been the mainstay of products used by organizations using charitable gaming as a fund raising tool.

The "Millionaire Party industry" was virtually non-existent prior to 2006! The use of this fund raising method escalated after a subtle change in the legislature that allowed for greater maximum prize payouts for patrons. It was this change in the "Bingo Act" and entrepreneurial spirit of business owners like my self that gave rise to the "Millionaire Party Location" and thus, the prosperity it now generates for nonprofit organizations. Because of this recent change in this law, and a change in the social atmosphere in America, use of these venues by poker aficionados has erupted, making this one of the most progressive and unsurpassed methods for fund raising in the country!

Utilizing this trend, local community organizations have found a method that gives them greater access to revenues that in many circumstances had dried up, during this recent economic downturn.

Not only does this program allow for new funding resources, but it also allows for the beginning of new business ventures created by many individuals some like myself who have little career choices left in this state after the collapse of our Industry base.

We entrepreneurial spirited Location owners, are solely responsible for turning “charitable gaming” into a viable and profitable method for fund raising, and in a small way, for job creation!

We are all aware of our State’s dire need for revenue building. We are all too familiar with the State of the State, it resounds in our heads, like a bad song! These new business owners should be applauded and supported! Instead we are the recipients of the constant saber rattling that we endure at the expense of the Legislature, Gaming Control Board, and the self appointed moral minority!

The increase of State taxes that would be created by businesses thriving in this arena would surely out weigh that of fee increases. So please don’t strap this reinvented program, with an overburden of fees, and penalize the users of these “locations” for finding the only profitable method of fund raising for this 37 year old program!

And do not cast a pointed finger at the “gambling issue” I need not remind this gathering that the overwhelming majority of voters cast their vote in 1994, securing their right to game in this state!

As proposed, increasing the daily fees to non-profit organization that use “Locations” seems counter productive to say the least. Increasing licensing costs to fledgling business that work to make inroads in new ventures, seems blatantly anti business, considering that these new businesses have already created tens of millions of dollars for the groups that this program was intended to provide for, and has added hundreds of thousands of dollars in yearly revenues to the Bureau of State Lottery, a department which is already fully revenue autonomous to the State’s budget!

Reasonable fees, licensing and regulation for Locations, similar to what is already mandated in the act for Suppliers, would be a realistic remedy for the “location” issue, more realistic than what had been proposed in the original bill or what has been negotiated in a Substitute Bill.

Remove the factors that create profitability in this program and you reduce the effectiveness of the program, and the reason for businesses to be involved.

It is my opinion, that this program does need more development as far as it regulations and parameters by which the Bureau of State Lottery governs it. The “catch as catch can” efficiency of the Bureau is frustrating to say the least. The waiting period for licensing for qualified organization is unrealistic. It should be a matter of minutes on a computer not the months as is the case. And a severe fee increase as suggested, for an “expedited license”, proves the ineffectiveness of the procedures at hand. Because if this is a remedy to a problem, then your telling me that if we constituents throw money at the process, it becomes quicker and easier for government to accomplish the task?

Although a singular association, the MCGA works towards progress today! I believe that this group’s effort would be better served if it was equally represented by both, non-profit organizations, and Suppliers/Location Owners. Because as it is, its membership is lopsided, 160+ nonprofits groups to 6 or 7 Supplier/Locations. To favor either side of this relationship causes an imbalance in the outcome of its intended progress. And to be given audience by legislative members, and Lottery officials, under the guise that this organization represents the industry, is a misstep in the effectiveness of developing new regulations and an injustice to the business having to work under the changes.

The Bureau should have an open door policy, for meetings, that includes Suppliers, Location owners, and nonprofit organization alike, allowing a voice to its constituents much as your committee does!

Without the forethought needed to create a cohesive program, the Lottery Bureau has created a non-entity that it must now add to the mix, but it neither has the authority to govern, or regulate locations, other than to deny issuance of licensing to nonprofit groups who wish to be granted use of the program and maintain profitability.

We Location Owners have a symbiotic relationship with our non-profit partners. Without either of the two entities the other would cease to exist. Licensed Suppliers failed to command any attention by nonprofit organizations for decades; it is these "Locations" that gave rise to Charity Gaming! And without Locations, charity gaming would be relinquished to languish in nonexistence, as it did for the first 32 years in this state! In closing, instituting parameters that stifle the growth of "Gaming Locations" during these severe economic times is short sighted and tantamount to turning the water off at an oasis!

Be attentive to your constituent's wants, and needs, instead of standing on some shaky, outdated, moral platform or the need to squeeze those with a small voice.

I ask this body of Legislators to be progressive, in helping to institute regulations that will create streamlining of the processes in this act, and allow business to thrive and create wealth for the nonprofit organizations, instead of being combative and counter productive.

Because the oasis we are talking about today is not Las Vegas, it is Livonia, and Lansing, and cities across this state! And although it is only a trickle, the fluid that sustains these oases, is Charitable Gaming!

Thank you

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